



Office for Standards
in Education

Inspection report
BLACKPOOL
Local Education Authority

Date of inspection: January 2003

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Basic information about the LEA

Name of LEA:	Blackpool Local Education Authority
Address of LEA:	The Director of Education, Cultural and Leisure Services, Blackpool LEA Progress House Clifton Road Blackpool FY4 4US
Lead inspector:	Brian Blake HMI
Date of inspection:	January 2003

Introduction

1. Ofsted carried out the inspection of Blackpool local education authority (LEA), in conjunction with the Audit Commission, under section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* (December 2001), which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.

2. The inspection was based partly on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with elected members, staff in the education, leisure and cultural services directorate, and in other council directorates. Group discussions were held with representatives of schools, and some of the LEA's partners. Telephone interviews were held with three primary schools and three secondary schools. Further telephone interviews were also held with a number of the LEA's partner agencies. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to all of its schools. The response rate was 98 per cent. Use was also made of the LEA's own self-evaluation.

3. An inspection of the council's social care services for children and families is due to be completed in April 2003 by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI). Where issues of common interest were identified, such as child protection and the education of looked after children, the lead inspector for the SSI inspection joined the Ofsted team, and worked with inspectors. Evidence collected has been used to inform both inspection processes.

4. For each inspected function of the LEA, an inspection team makes a judgement, which is converted into a numerical grade. An inspection team may make up to 52 key inspection judgements. An inspection judgement is made against criteria for each inspected function of the LEA. These criteria (and the guidance notes on functions of a LEA that may be inspected by Ofsted) can be found on the Ofsted website. The numerical grades awarded for the judgements made in this inspection are appended to this report, along with short explanations of what each numerical grade represents. Judgements on inspected functions of a LEA are made during the inspection of the LEA and indicate the effectiveness of the LEA's performance of individual functions at the time of the inspection. The numerical grades awarded by the inspection team complement the areas of the report that comment on the individual functions scrutinised on this inspection, and, as such, must be considered in the light of those comments.

5. Some of the grades are used in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) profile for the education service. It is intended that the CPA for education will be updated annually so that the grades from this inspection will contribute to the next annual assessment.

6. The CPA for the education service takes account of the performance of several aspects of the local service, including pre-school and adult education. The CPA for education is composed of a number of inspection judgements, as well as other performance indicators, such as improvement trends at Key Stage 3. The assessment, published in December 2002, gives star ratings for each local authority for a range of local services, for example social services, benefits, environment etc, whereas this report focuses on the local authority's work to support school improvement.

Commentary

7. Blackpool is the largest seaside resort in Great Britain, whose population doubles at the height of the summer season. Almost one fifth of its residents are of retirement age, and a significant number is also part of the large transient population that finds its way to Blackpool for a variety of socio-economic and other reasons. There are some relatively prosperous areas within the borough, but of the 22 wards, seven are in the bottom ten per cent of wards nationally. Thirty-two per cent of the population live within these wards. A small proportion of the total population, around 1.8 per cent, is from non-white minority ethnic groups.

8. At the time of the previous inspection in September 2000, the LEA was satisfactory overall, with many strengths. Since then, Blackpool LEA has made satisfactory or better progress in most areas. The LEA's support for management services to schools, special educational needs (SEN) and most aspects of social inclusion are now good. The support for school improvement has improved since the previous inspection and, overall, is now highly satisfactory, with good support in literacy, numeracy and curriculum use of information and communication technology (ICT). Most corporate aspects of the LEA are at least satisfactory, but the clarity and coherence of the council's corporate plans, and the procedures for evaluating them are unsatisfactory.

9. The major challenge for the LEA remains the overall low levels of attainment and attendance of Blackpool's pupils. Pupils' attainment since 2000 has been below the national averages at Key Stages 1 and 3, and in most indicators at Key Stage 4. Performance at Key Stage 2, by contrast, has generally been in line with the standards found nationally. Levels of attendance have been consistently below the national averages at both primary and secondary level, with the secondary average below 90 per cent. The LEA recognises this challenge and has, quite rightly, focused attention on its school improvement strategy as an aid to helping schools raise their overall levels of attainment and attendance. The Education Development Plan (EDP2) is a key document in the LEA's school improvement strategy. It provides a very clear focus for LEA advisory staff and other specialist support officers working with schools. However, the 2004 targets at Key Stage 2 and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) are extremely challenging and, given the current rates of year-on-year improvement, the LEA is unlikely to achieve them unless significant progress is made over the next two years.

10. The high levels of transience in the population result in high rates of pupil mobility in Blackpool's schools. Since the previous inspection, pupil mobility in schools has increased to a current range of just below five per cent to over 50 per cent. All schools are affected, but those in the most deprived wards have the highest rates of pupil mobility. The LEA is well aware of the effects that mobility has on levels of attainment and attendance, and has been working in partnership with schools and national researchers to develop strategies that will help counteract its effects. The LEA has willingly involved itself in local school initiatives, as well as national schemes, like Excellence in Cities, to aid its schools in raising standards. The Excellence in Cities scheme, known as 'Excellence in Blackpool', has had a positive effect on the links and working relationships between the LEA and its schools. 'Excellence in Blackpool' initiatives link well to the LEA's overall social inclusion strategy. However, despite continued effort and good work across these areas, the LEA has yet to make any significant inroads into the overall levels of attainment and attendance of pupils who move frequently in and out of schools.

11. There are particular strengths in:

- the Education Development Plan;
- the extent to which the LEA targets its resources on priorities;
- support for ICT;
- support to governors;
- the effectiveness of services to support school management, including financial services, human resources and catering;
- the level of staff expertise to support school improvement;
- provision and support for special educational needs;
- the support for social inclusion;
- the provision for pupils with no school place;
- looked after children;
- the planning of school places;
- asset management planning;
- admissions to schools; and
- the leadership provided by senior officers.

12. There are weaknesses in:

- pupils' performance at Key Stages 1, 3 and 4;
- pupils' attendance;
- the clarity, consistency, and coherence of corporate plans; and
- the effectiveness of the procedures for evaluating corporate plans.

13. The leadership given by elected members has improved since the previous inspection. The elected members have increased spending on education up to the level of the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA), and have now placed education at the top of their priorities for the future development of the borough. Through a modernised local government structure, the elected members are beginning to show the leadership qualities needed to bring their educational aspirations to fruition. There is a particular need now to develop the role of scrutiny within the authority. LEA officers are also playing a significant part in raising the profile of education, and in providing good quality leadership that is helping to galvanise positive and collective support from schools and other partners, with whom the LEA has been working. At 98 per cent, the response rate from Blackpool schools to the Audit Commission pre-inspection schools' survey was the best in England. The findings from this survey indicate a high level of trust between the LEA and its schools, together with a high level of satisfaction with the LEA's services.

14. This is a highly satisfactory LEA, with a good capacity to improve and to act upon the recommendations of this report. The performance of the education service is reflected in the CPA for education, published in December 2002. This assessment gave the education service two stars for current performance and three stars (highest grading) for its capacity to make further improvement.

Section 1: The LEA's strategy for school improvement

Context

15. The key contextual features identified in the previous Ofsted inspection report remain. Blackpool is the largest seaside resort in Britain. There are around 150,000 people, with almost one fifth over the age of retirement. Blackpool has a significant number of areas of multiple deprivation¹ and a high level of population transience. Both factors present challenges to the authority on the range of services for which it is responsible.

16. There are eight secondary schools, seven of which are for pupils aged 11–16 and one for those aged 11–18. The total population at secondary level is circa 8,650. Four secondary schools have achieved specialist college status, one of which is also a Beacon school. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has designated three schools in challenging circumstances. All secondary schools are part of the 'Excellence in Blackpool' initiative. There are 24 primary schools, four junior and four infant schools catering for circa 11,819 pupils. One school has been granted early excellence status, two schools are in special measures. One school, with serious weaknesses, has had a recent successful inspection visit from HMI. One school, previously deemed under-achieving, has recently had a successful Ofsted inspection. Three primary schools have Beacon status. There are three special schools, with a total population of circa 293 pupils. There is one registered pupil referral unit with provision for 219 pupils. Currently, 86 per cent of all three year-old children and 100 per cent of four year-olds are placed in early years' educational settings.

17. The mobility rates of pupils at both primary and secondary levels are above the national averages. However, the rates vary significantly across schools in both phases. All but seven primary schools had a mobility rate of over ten per cent in 2001/2002. Nine were over 20 per cent, and one was at 50 per cent. The mobility rate at secondary level is also high. Only two are below five per cent, three schools are over ten per cent and one over 30 per cent. This has been a consistent pattern since the inception of the LEA in 1998. These high rates of mobility have adversely affected pupils' attainment in national end of key stage tests and GCSE examinations.

18. The percentage of pupils receiving free school meals, at 26.1 per cent, is above the national average at primary level. It is 22.3 per cent at secondary level, which is in line with the national average. It is in line with similar LEAs² in both phases.

19. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well below that found nationally and in similar LEAs. The percentage of pupils with English as an additional language is below the national average at primary level, and in line at secondary level.

20. The percentage of primary age pupils in special schools is in line with that found nationally and in LEAs with similar characteristics. At secondary level, it is well above the national average, and above that found in similar LEAs. The percentage of primary age pupils with a statement of special educational need is above that found nationally and in LEAs with similar characteristics. At secondary level, it is well above the national average, and above that found in statistical neighbours.

¹ The Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions index of multiple deprivation 2000 shows Blackpool to have seven wards in the bottom ten per cent of wards nationally. Thirty-two per cent of the total population live in these wards.

² Blackpool's statistical neighbours are Tameside, North Tyneside, Stoke on Trent, Dudley, Portsmouth, Gateshead, Sunderland, Wigan, Stockton-on-Tees and St Helens.

Performance

21. Pupils' performance in baseline assessment is well below that expected for children of a similar age. At Key Stage 1, pupils perform well below the standards found nationally and in statistical neighbours in reading, writing and mathematics. There are no significant differences between boys and girls.

22. At Key Stage 2, pupils perform in line with both the national and statistical neighbours' averages in all three core subjects for Level 4+. A similar picture emerges for Level 5+. Girls score significantly better in English, less well in mathematics, and similar to boys in science.

23. At Key Stage 3, pupils score below the national average in all three core subjects, but achieve in line in English and mathematics for similar LEAs. This is the same for both Level 5+ and Level 6+. Boys out-perform girls marginally in mathematics and science, but score significantly less well in English.

24. At Key Stage 4, the attainment of pupils gaining one or more A* - G grades is in line with that found nationally and in similar LEAs. The performance of pupils at five or more at A* - G grades is below that found nationally and in LEAs with similar characteristics. Attainment at five or more A* - C grades, and the average points score is well below the national average, and also below that found in similar LEAs. Boys perform marginally better than girls across most key stages.

25. There is variation in the performance of the different minority ethnic groups across all key stages. Although the numbers are small, pupils of Bangladeshi and Chinese heritage out-perform other ethnic groups at Key Stages 1 and 4. In Key Stages 2 and 3, White UK pupils perform less well than other ethnic groups.

26. The attainment of looked after children at all key stages is well below the national average. Only seven per cent achieved Level 5+ at Key Stage 3, and nine per cent five or more A* - C grades at GCSE.

27. The rate of progress of pupils between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is above that found nationally. It is in line between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, and below between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.

28. The LEA's rate of improvement, compared with the national rate, varies across the different key stages. At Key Stage 1, it is below in reading and writing, but in line in mathematics. At Key Stage 2, it is broadly in line in English and mathematics, and above in science. At Key Stage 3, it is below in English and mathematics, and well below in science. At Key Stage 4, it is above for one or more A* - G grades, but below for five or more A* - C grades and the average points score in GCSE examinations. The LEA has been successfully closing the gap with the national average for five or more A* - G grades since the previous inspection.

29. Unvalidated data for 2002 indicates that, against national and statistical neighbours' averages, there have been improvements in reading and mathematics at Key Stage 1, a decline in all three core subjects at Key Stage 2, and no movement at Key Stage 3. With the exception of an improvement in five or more A* - G grades, other indicators at Key Stage 4 have remained the same.

30. The attendance of pupils in primary schools is below that found nationally and in statistical neighbours. Authorised absence is slightly above, as is unauthorised absence. At secondary level, attendance falls below 90 per cent and is also below that found nationally and in statistical neighbours. The level of authorised absence is well above that found nationally and in LEAs with similar characteristics. Unauthorised absence is in line with both national and statistical neighbours' averages.

31. The percentage rate of exclusions from both primary and secondary school is in line with that found nationally and in LEAs with similar characteristics. The percentage of primary and secondary schools that were good or very good at the time of their last inspection is broadly in line with the national averages, and those found in LEAs with similar characteristics.

Funding

32. In 1999/2000, the council budgeted to spend at 94.7 per cent of the Standard Spending Assessment. Since this time, spending against SSA has been gradually increased, reaching 100 per cent of SSA in 2002/2003. Blackpool receives close to the average level of funding for unitary authorities from the SSA. The delegated resources in the individual schools budget (ISB) per primary pupil are marginally higher than the per pupil average for unitary authorities, but below for England. For secondary schools, the individual schools budget per pupil is below the averages for both unitary authorities and England.

	Blackpool LEA £ per pupil	Statistical neighbours £ per pupil	Unitary authorities £ per pupil	England £ per pupil
Primary ISB	2171	2121	2153	2223
Secondary ISB	2711	2760	2852	2940

Data source: CIPFA Section 52 data 2002.

33. The total cost of the LEA's activities per pupil is substantially higher than the average for unitary authorities and for England. This is due to high central costs for special educational needs. The issues involved with this are explained more fully in section three, which covers special educational needs. Central costs for strategic management, the EDP2 implementation, and access are at or below the averages for unitary authorities and England.

	Blackpool LEA £ per pupil	Statistical neighbours £ per pupil	Unitary authorities £ per pupil	England £ per pupil
Strategic management	88	122	93	101
School improvement	29	30	26	31
Access	101	91	124	131
SEN	230	139	151	160

Total	448	382	394	423
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Data source: CIPFA Section 52 data 2002.

34. Blackpool did not meet the DfES targets for delegation of funding to schools and increases in the Age Weighted Pupil Unit in 2002/2003. Only 85.6 per cent of the budget was delegated, compared with the target of 87 per cent. Despite options for further delegation discussed with schools as part of the budget consultation process, schools preferred to retain the current level of delegation. This was sensible given the central resourcing of pupils with emotional and behaviour difficulties, and the impending changes to the national funding formulae. The Age Weighted Pupil Unit targets for secondary schools were not met because of changes made to the school funding formula, which transferred resources to primary schools.

35. Since the previous inspection, external funding has increased substantially. Blackpool has become eligible for deprivation-related funding through Excellence in Cities, the Single Regeneration Budget, and European Objective 2 funding. Substantial lottery funding has been obtained for sports development in schools. During the last three years, Blackpool has also been successful in obtaining around £25 million in capital funding for investment in school buildings. A further £20 million in capital funding has now been secured for the next three years. This has included Basic Needs funding for a substantial number of extra places, particularly in the secondary sector, as well as money through the New Deal for Schools for improvements in condition and modernisation of school buildings. An external funding officer has been appointed to work with schools to assist them to obtain further external funding, which is a sensible approach by the authority.

Council structure

36. There are 44 elected members representing 22 wards. The council currently comprises 25 Labour, 15 Conservative and four Liberal Democrats. There are seven portfolio holders in the cabinet, one of whom is for lifelong learning and citizenship. There are two scrutiny committees, each with pro-rata representation from the three political parties. The scrutiny committee responsible for education also has a wide brief for other community areas, including housing.

37. The council elected a new leader in 2001, and also appointed a new chief executive in April 2002. The present director of education, leisure and cultural services has been in post since the inception of Blackpool LEA in 1998. He leads one of the four directorates within the authority, and is a member of the chief executive's strategy and performance group.

The LEA's strategy for school improvement

38. The Education Development Plan is good, and its implementation satisfactory. The LEA responded quickly to the initial comments from the Department for Education and Skills of their new EDP2. Priority three, raising attainment at Key Stage 4, was rewritten and now the overall balance of the plan is good, with a range of detailed activities covering all priority areas and activities. The audit information is clear and well presented to justify the range of activities within the plan. This applies particularly to the identified local priority, tackling the effects of transient pupils. Key personnel are appropriately identified to lead or assist in priority activities, and in most areas, the sequence of tasks is well thought out and thorough. However, a large number of the activities lack sufficiently specific timescales as an aid to

monitoring progress over the life of the plan. Links to other plans are satisfactory, with appropriate references to common areas. For example, the strands of the 'Excellence in Blackpool' initiative feature across a number of priority activities.

Recommendation

In order to assist in the monitoring and evaluation of the EDP2:

- detail more specific timescales for the range of priority activities.

39. The 2004 targets agreed with the DfES for the end of key stage attainment are challenging, especially at Key Stage 2, where there needs to be an increase of almost 16 per cent in English and 12 per cent in mathematics over the next two years. Given the current year-on-year rate of improvement, this is unlikely. The LEA recognises the challenges that these targets present, and increased effort is currently being directed at schools in the core subjects of English and mathematics.

40. In common with many other LEAs that have high levels of pupil mobility, Blackpool has yet to develop a successful strategy that helps to raise the attainment levels of these pupils. Since the inception of the LEA, officers, individual schools and research specialists from University College London have been working on a range of strategies to support highly mobile pupils. One such strategy has been the appointment of a transience co-ordinator who is working with a local university. Some of these ideas are satisfactorily encompassed in the local priority six, which is targeted at the mobile pupil population.

41. No substantial inspection fieldwork was carried out on the progress that the LEA is making with its strategy for school improvement. However, the documentation provided by the LEA, together with evidence from interviews, indicate that, with a few exceptions, overall progress at this time is at least satisfactory. There are some activities that have missed their target date, for example the intention to produce recommendations to schools on work-related learning in priority three, and the setting up of a transience pupil forum in priority six.

The allocation of resources to priorities

42. At the time of the previous inspection the allocation of resources to priorities was satisfactory. The LEA was recommended to review the alignment and sufficiency of resources for schools and the LEA's services, to develop a strategy for the delegation of a greater proportion of the SEN budget, and to encourage the reduction of primary school balances. Good progress has been made in all these areas, and the allocation of resources to priorities is now good. Particular strengths are the increased education spending by the local authority, the mechanisms for consultation with schools on budget priorities, and the very good work on the school funding formula, including delegation of resources for SEN.

43. The council has good mechanisms for reviewing educational priorities as part of the annual budget-setting process. Longer-term financial planning, either at a council or education directorate level is only currently developed to a limited extent. The budget managers have clear budget-monitoring responsibilities and, as a result, spending of the education budget is tightly controlled.

44. Consultation with schools on budget priorities is excellent. A good dialogue takes place with the LEA, and schools are provided with clear information. A particular strength has been the work on implementing the needs-led funding formula. The good relations with schools on funding issues has allowed changes to be implemented, including increased

resources for primary schools and the delegation of resources for SEN to schools. The use of SEN resources by schools is monitored effectively.

45. Two secondary schools had budget deficits in 2001/2002, but one of these was a planned deficit for a building project. A recovery plan is in place for the other school. Net surpluses were increasing in schools until 2000/2001, but have reduced during 2001/2002. Appropriate mechanisms are now in place to challenge schools that have high surpluses.

Structure for achieving Best Value

46. This aspect was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. It is now highly satisfactory. Improvement strategies and performance management are good in many, but not all, parts of the education directorate. The management support services, SEN, and some of the services supporting social inclusion are good. Best Value has made satisfactory contributions to improvements in services. The Best Value Performance Plan was agreed unconditionally by external auditors.

47. Performance management arrangements, linking service and financial plans to individual targets and to performance indicators, are used successfully to monitor the quality of the service. These indicate the variability in overall service provision.

48. A series of Best Value reviews has been carried out in parts of the education, leisure and cultural services directorate. In common with most authorities, initial reviews were too narrow; for example, learning and behaviour support services in two separate reviews. The reviews have, however, produced positive outcomes for the quality of the services. A good example of this is the review of catering services, which was inspected by the Audit Commission Inspection Service, and received two stars with promising prospects for improvement.

Section 2: Support for school improvement

Summary of the effectiveness of the LEA's support for school improvement

49. Since the previous inspection, the quality of support for school improvement has improved in all areas. With the exception of support to areas of greatest need, which is satisfactory with some strong features, all other functions are highly satisfactory or good.

50. Despite this good progress, overall standards of attainment are still the major weakness for the LEA. Some progress has been made since the previous inspection, but the LEA has not been able to reduce the gap between its rate of improvement and those found nationally, or in LEAs with similar characteristics. The very high pupil mobility rates that the LEA experiences account for some, but not necessarily all, of the reasons for the continued differences in performance.

51. Senior officers are well aware of the continuing challenge that the LEA faces to improve standards of attainment. The level of expertise provided by these officers and their commitment to school improvement is good and their contribution to greater social inclusion for all pupils is highly satisfactory. Very strong partnership links between the LEA and schools have been established.

The effectiveness of services to support school improvement

52. The leadership of services to support school improvement was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. It is now highly satisfactory. There is a clear vision and strong leadership from the director and head of the advisory and inspection service, both of whom have gained the confidence of schools and have established an effective sense of partnership and collaboration across the LEA. Communication with schools is very good and there is a clear sense of direction in recent initiatives to raise standards in all schools.

53. The advisory and inspection service team has increased in number since the last inspection, although its small size means that all advisers have to provide leadership in a range of different areas. The experience and knowledge of the LEA's advisers are good, and their work is highly regarded in schools. Where gaps in curriculum expertise exist, the LEA has made good use of part-time appointments, external support and specialist knowledge in schools. The practice of pairing advisers with schools means that support is provided for new advisers, and continuity of support to schools is ensured. Schools are also supported by a large number of advisory teachers and consultants, most of whom are linked to the national strategies in literacy and numeracy.

54. Advisers and consultants are mostly deployed on activities that contribute to the targets in the EDP2. Schools understand that the level of support varies according to need. However, visits to schools need to be monitored more closely to ensure that they are all necessary and to ensure that the impact of the support is as effective as possible.

55. The LEA has a wide range of plans and procedures in place to support school improvement. These include the EDP2, the LEA's policy and procedures document, the LEA's support plans for individual schools, the school support register, the plan for under-performing schools, annual reports on schools, routine advisers' visit notes and termly reports from pupils' services. Targets in these plans are ambitious and priorities focus directly on raising standards. In practice, however, some of these plans and procedures do not yet operate entirely as described.

56. A well-devised performance management scheme has recently been introduced for the LEA's officers. This reviews performance against a range of service targets, involves some self-evaluation and identifies priorities and training needs. Induction of new advisers is good. The work of advisers is monitored by senior colleagues through joint visits and reviewing school visit notes, although there has been no evident effect on the quality of the written notes to schools.

57. Resources targeted at school improvement are above the average for unitary authorities. In the circumstances, the value for money of the school improvement services is satisfactory.

Monitoring, challenge and intervention

58. The LEA's work in monitoring, challenging, supporting and intervening in schools was satisfactory with a small number of weaknesses at the time of the previous inspection. It is now highly satisfactory. At that time, all schools were routinely visited twice a term, although headteachers did not always understand the level of support to which they were entitled.

59. Since the previous inspection, schools have been fully consulted on new procedures for monitoring schools and these are published in the EDP2. The LEA now places schools in one of five categories, based on clear criteria for intervention that were shared with schools and are fully supported by them. All schools receive termly visits with a published agenda, together with an additional visit in the autumn term to discuss target setting. Some schools also receive additional visits, depending on the LEA's analysis of their level of need.

The focusing of the LEA's support on areas of greatest need

60. This area was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection and remains so. The proposals for differentiating support for schools according to their needs were considered at an early stage by the joint steering committee of LEA officers and headteachers. The LEA collects a wide range of data about pupils' performance and, together with evidence from Ofsted inspections and their own advisers' visits to schools, uses these data to place all schools in the appropriate support category.

61. Following the previous inspection, the LEA established an education management system that receives data files from each Blackpool school, and is used to build a full pupil history. The LEA is also beginning to share detailed information about the performance of other groups of pupils, including minority ethnic pupils and highly mobile pupils. The LEA's advisers show a good understanding of data analysis and use this to provide challenge to schools about overall attainment and progress of pupils.

62. The LEA knows its schools well and those schools identified as most in need generally receive the most sustained support. However, although the procedures are clear, the implications of the differentiated approach are not always fully understood by schools or followed by officers. Some headteachers are unaware of their exact allocation of visits within the LEA's scheme; this means that they approach the LEA for support and advice even when their allocation of days has been exhausted. Because the LEA provides no additional purchased school improvement services to schools, and because senior managers do not monitor visits to schools closely enough, advisers respond too readily to some requests from

schools. One effect of this is that the LEA intervenes too much in some of its successful schools.

Recommendations

In order to target support more effectively for schools most in need, the LEA should:

- Establish levels of support for successful schools to ensure that they are fully encouraged to develop autonomy; and
- Monitor more closely all visits to schools to ensure that they conform to the agreed level of service.

The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools

63. The previous inspection found these aspects of the LEA's work to be satisfactory. They are now highly satisfactory. Although there was limited fieldwork undertaken, inspectors read a large amount of documentation provided by the LEA, in addition to considering the views of schools in the pre-inspection survey.

64. Support for schools is differentiated, with a similar number of visits for all schools, together with additional support based on specified criteria. Pupil services provide schools with service specific reports on a termly basis. These reports form the basis for targeted input in, for example, the area of attendance. Notes of visit are completed by advisers and consultants and sent to the headteacher. They are usually detailed and support the oral feedback given to teachers and headteachers. However, some lack direct evaluation and it is not always clear what follow-up action is required. These notes are not sent to the chair of the governing body, although they do subsequently receive an annual summary of advisers' visits to their schools. The LEA's annual report for the governing body provides a view of standards in the school, summarises the most recent Ofsted inspection, and identifies any significant changes in the school context. However, this report is less useful in supporting the work of governing bodies since it includes information that should already be familiar to them. The lack of a clear external view of a school's strengths and weaknesses in the annual reports represents a missed opportunity to support governing bodies in the exercise of their responsibility to hold the school to account for its standards.

Recommendations

In order to improve the effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools:

- Ensure that all notes of visits provide a clear evaluation of the strengths, weaknesses and any follow-up action required by the school and the LEA; and
- Make better use of the visit reports and the annual report to governing bodies to provide schools with a clear LEA view of strengths and weaknesses.

65. All schools have received training in self-evaluation, based on Ofsted materials. Eleven schools have been supported in the use of the index of social inclusion and all schools are expected to raise issues for discussion during the visits from link advisers. Advisers also complete an annual LEA support form with schools to review their strengths and weaknesses and to agree the level of support required. Link advisers report regularly to their own senior management team about schools and this enables a prompt review of schools' needs for support and intervention. A sign of the effectiveness of the support provided by the LEA is that nearly half the schools have moved up at least one category in the LEA's measure of effectiveness over the past two years.

66. The quality of the performance data shared with schools is high, and comprises a set of comparative statistical and benchmarking data provided by the LEA to each type of school. These data have helped to set extremely ambitious end of key stage targets, and have also served to focus attention on how schools might set higher expectations. The LEA took a lead in this area by establishing a cross-phase initiative in teaching and learning in order to emphasise some of the new measures that might be needed if schools are to meet their improvement targets.

The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools

67. This area was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. It remains satisfactory with some strong features. Currently, two primary schools require special measures and one has serious weaknesses. Two other primary schools are on the LEA's list of schools causing concern. The LEA also has three secondary schools in challenging circumstances. The LEA has helped three schools to be removed from special measures within an 18-month period.

68. The procedures that are now in place help the LEA to identify schools that are causing concern, and are well known and supported by schools. The LEA's senior officers review the progress of these schools on a weekly basis and governing bodies are kept well informed about developments. Most schools causing concern receive significant and focused additional support. However, this support is not always managed or monitored as well as possible. The frequency of visits to some schools causing concern by a range of advisers and consultants is difficult to reconcile within the overall support programme provided by the LEA. One school, for example, that recently went into special measures had been identified by the LEA as a school with significant weaknesses, but the monitoring activities undertaken were unclear.

Support for literacy

69. This area was highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. It remains highly satisfactory with some strong features. Attainment at Key Stage 1 is well below both the national and statistical neighbours' averages, although there was some improvement in 2002. At Key Stage 2, attainment has been in line with the national averages since the previous inspection. With the exception of 2002, attainment at Key Stages 1 & 2 has increased broadly in line with the national trend since the previous inspection.

70. The LEA's strategy for raising standards in literacy is clear, well understood by teachers, and is well led by a knowledgeable adviser. The literacy action plan, which is linked to the EDP2 priority one, sets out a clear programme for the work of the literacy team. The EDP2 also sets out challenging targets for the LEA in 2003 and 2004. The LEA has recognised this challenge and has allocated more time and resources to help raise overall levels of attainment. Additional funding, above the Standards Fund allocation, has been used to appoint an extra consultant. However, unless significant progress is made over the course of the next two years, it will be difficult for the LEA to achieve these targets.

71. Performance data are used well by schools and the literacy team to target under-performing schools for additional support. Literacy consultants have a satisfactory action plan for each school in which they work. The plan is well understood by teachers, and the support given to schools is good. However, these plans are not sufficiently linked to schools'

performance targets, which does not make it easy to monitor either the work of consultants or the progress the school is making in raising standards.

72. The LEA has provided good quality training. This includes national and locally developed courses. These have included, for example, the better reading partnership in primary schools and family learning schemes, both of which are helping to improve provision and raise standards. Good use has been made of leading English teachers to support teaching and learning, and the sharing of good practice. The LEA promotes this group widely, and teachers see it as an extremely valuable resource in helping them to raise standards. A strong feature in supporting literacy work in primary schools is the close link with teachers in the secondary phase on curriculum, teaching and transition issues between Year 6 and Year 7. This work is ensuring that the strengths of both the secondary and primary phases are drawn upon to raise the quality of literacy teaching.

Support for numeracy

73. This area was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. It is now highly satisfactory with many strengths. Attainment at Key Stage 1 is below the national and statistical neighbours' averages, although there was a slight improvement in 2002. At Key Stage 2, the LEA achieves broadly in line with national and statistical neighbours' averages. With the exception of 2002, standards have risen in line with national trends since the previous inspection. The Key Stage 2 targets set for 2003 and 2004 are very challenging and are unlikely to be met, unless significant progress is made over the course of the next two years.

74. The numeracy team has drawn together a satisfactory action plan that is closely linked to EDP2 priority one. The plan is well understood by schools, and sets out a good range of relevant activities to help raise standards in schools. Consultants have an agreed action plan for each school in which they work. As with the literacy strategy, these plans lack reference to schools' numerical targets, which makes monitoring the progress that the school is making during the year more difficult than it needs to be. The work of the numeracy consultants is well managed and highly regarded by teachers. As in literacy, the LEA has funded an extra consultant to support schools, as an aid to increase the level of support to schools and help raise standards.

75. Schools are clear about how they are identified for additional support, and where a school receives both literacy and numeracy support, the LEA successfully ensures that these are planned together to make best use of available resources.

76. The LEA has a good training programme, and consultants are skilled in adapting the national training programme to meet the specific needs of Blackpool teachers. In addition, the leading mathematics teacher scheme is well established, and monitoring visits by Ofsted indicate that this is making a significant contribution to developing numeracy teaching and learning across the LEA. Good links also exist between the primary and secondary strategies, which is useful in ensuring that effective practice is shared across the two phases.

Recommendation

In order to improve the support for literacy and numeracy in schools, the strategy teams should:

- link each school action plan specifically to performance targets.

Support for information and communication technology

77. At the time of the previous inspection, support for curriculum use of ICT was satisfactory. The LEA was recommended to help schools use ICT in other subjects, and disseminate good practice both within and outside the LEA. In both these aspects the LEA has made satisfactory progress, and overall support for ICT is now good.

78. Planning for ICT is now fully integrated into strategic thinking at corporate level. An ICT strategy group includes representatives from across the authority's directorates and headteachers. The LEA has a detailed ICT development plan, and has integrated ICT into many of the priority areas of the EDP2. Delivery of the plans is through a competent central ICT support team, which includes a lead adviser, two primary ICT consultants, a Key Stage 3 consultant and an ICT manager. The support work from all the consultants, including the early work on Key Stage 3 ICT strategy is highly satisfactory, and valued by schools.

79. Ofsted inspections indicate that attainment at Key Stages 1 and 2 has risen since the previous inspection, while attainment at Key Stages 3 and 4 has fluctuated over the same period. The LEA has set realistic, yet challenging targets for further improvements in ICT.

80. The LEA has begun work in supporting and training schools on making assessments in ICT, not only for reporting at Key Stage 3, but also at Key Stages 1 and 2, with a view to enhancing transition work between the key stages. The LEA acknowledges there is still much work to be carried out in this area, particularly at Key Stage 3.

81. The LEA has met the great majority of national targets for ICT. Broadband provision has been provided in all schools since spring 2000, and teachers will have received the New Opportunities Fund training by required deadlines. Nearly all schools have met the 2002 target for pupil to computer ratios.

82. Good progress has been made in the application of ICT across the curriculum in primary schools. Further work is planned, but a key priority is still the cross-curricular use in high schools. To complement the training for schools, consultants have produced a good range of support materials for use in the classroom. The LEA also has a 'content management group', which oversees and manages the spending of National Grid for Learning funding on ICT resources for schools.

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

83. This area was not previously inspected. The LEA has been successful in implementing the Key Stage 3 strategy, and, although the support offered to schools is highly satisfactory, the effects on attainment have not yet been realised.

84. Attainment since the previous inspection has shown little improvement. In 2001, standards of attainment at Key Stage 3 were below the national averages, but broadly in line with statistical neighbours' averages in all three core subjects. The 2002 results showed no overall improvement, with little gain in English, no change in mathematics and a small decrease in science. Attendance has remained below the national average since the previous inspection, but rates of fixed-term exclusions have fallen.

85. Good progress has been made in establishing a team of knowledgeable consultants. They work closely together, and with advisers in the school improvement team, to offer

coherent support to all secondary schools. The organisation of the consultants' work, and the cross-curricular approach to the support offered to schools, are good examples of the LEA's commitment to meet the needs of individual schools. The training provided by the LEA successfully blends national priorities with local needs. Officers are well aware of the importance of raising standards at Key Stage 3, and are appropriately using a wide range of information to ensure that support is well targeted. This includes better and more effective use of data by the LEA and schools to identify under-performing groups. Planning to support Key Stage 3 priorities and activities is detailed well in the EDP2. However, the 2003 and 2004 targets are very challenging. The LEA will have to make significant progress over the next two years in order to achieve these targets.

86. The English and mathematics strands are well established in schools. The recently introduced strands focusing on ICT, foundation subjects and science are quickly and effectively being implemented. Close working with the primary strategy teams is a positive feature of the work at Key Stage 3, with transition work in mathematics and English of a particularly good standard. Observations of primary leading mathematics and English teachers by secondary staff have supported teaching and learning in Year 7. In addition, the LEA's teaching and learning initiative has developed many cross-curricular projects to raise the quality of teaching, such as assessment. The outcomes of this work are of high quality.

Support for minority ethnic groups, including Travellers

87. At the time of the previous inspection, support for the small number of minority ethnic pupils was inadequate. Provision for Traveller children, secured through a partnership agreement between Blackpool, Blackburn with Darwen and Lancashire is good.

88. The minority ethnic school population is still small, but has risen from below one per cent to 1.6 per cent in the past 18 months. This has put some strain on the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant funding, which is based on an original figure that is now out of date. However, the LEA provides further funding for the minority ethnic plan and the ethnic minority support service.

89. At Key Stage 1, Bangladeshi, Chinese and Indian pupils attained good overall results. Most groups at Key Stage 2 met their 2001 targets in English, mathematics and science, and some exceeded them. At the end of Key Stage 3, although numbers are small, Black African, Black Caribbean and Chinese pupils performed better than their LEA White UK counterparts. The 2001 Key Stage 4 GCSE performance indicated that there was significant improvement on the corresponding performance in 2000. Bangladeshi and Chinese pupils performed better than the White UK cohort in the five or more A*- C category, and almost all minority ethnic groups performed better than the LEA's White UK pupils in the one or more A*- C category. These figures reflect a notable improvement in the educational attainment of minority ethnic pupils.

90. The collection and analysis of minority ethnic attainment data are improving. Effective use is made of these data to identify underachieving groups, monitor their progress and deploy resources to support them. Target setting is developing well. There is a good policy and there are clear guidelines to meet the needs of bilingual pupils. There is also a well-received programme of training and good guidance for schools that focuses on the development of policies, procedures and strategies to promote racial equality and to raise standards of attainment. These take good account of the recommendations of the Macpherson report into the death of Stephen Lawrence, and good links have been established with the Commission for Racial Equality.

91. The Travellers' support services consortium provides good quality support to Traveller children. The work of this service is integrated effectively into the LEA's strategy for school improvement, and good links have been established with families on local authority sites, private sites, and with settled Travellers in permanent housing. The service focuses on establishing Traveller children in a school, identifying gaps and needs in education and then supplying support to make up deficiencies. Curriculum materials include good quality distance learning packs.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

92. This area was not previously inspected. The LEA is currently providing a good level of support for gifted and talented pupils. The LEA has successfully raised the profile of these pupils across the authority, helped in part by specific 'Excellence in Blackpool' funding for gifted and talented pupils. There are many opportunities for pupils to demonstrate artistic, sporting and musical talent at high quality events, with the LEA actively supporting a number of council-wide programmes. A range of useful documentation and information has been made available to schools, and a knowledgeable co-ordinator and adviser are working well together to provide support for schools, including the scrutiny of action plans, provision of enhancement activities, and raising awareness among parents.

93. The LEA has met its 2002 targets for gifted pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4. While raising attainment of gifted and talented pupils at Key Stage 3 is a priority activity in the EDP2, there is less emphasis given to this area of work at Key Stage 4. However, a helpful model policy for gifted and talented pupils is available to all schools, although the main focus is currently on the secondary schools, and those primary schools in the education action zone. The LEA is keen to support all primary schools to meet the needs of their gifted and talented pupils. Many schools are still developing this area of work, and the LEA is providing a good range of support to enable them to manage their own development.

94. All secondary schools have identified around ten per cent of their pupil population, deemed gifted and talented, to receive additional support. Each secondary school held a summer school in 2002, which were successful in involving the community, teachers, and pupils. The LEA has supported gifted and talented co-ordinators to attend national training sooner than was planned, which has helped to ensure that clear schemes and guidance are in place in all secondary schools. Regular meetings of the co-ordinators, led by the LEA's officers, facilitates the sharing of good practice, as well as acting as an effective support network.

Support for school management

95. Limited fieldwork was carried out in this area. Support for school leadership was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. There have been a number of improvements in the last two years and it is now highly satisfactory.

96. The LEA has rightly identified the importance of effective leadership and management in the EDP2. Headteachers have been encouraged to work closely together and this is helping to create a partnership between schools that facilitates the sharing of good practice. However, while the proportion of secondary schools judged by Ofsted inspections to be well managed is in line with statistical neighbours, the proportion of primary schools judged similarly is below average.

97. A large number of senior managers have been encouraged to pursue additional training, including the national leadership and management schemes. The LEA offers a good range of local training events for groups such as headteachers, deputy headteachers, heads of department and special educational needs co-ordinators. Since the previous inspection, an induction programme for new headteachers has been successfully introduced, and a successful programme for the performance management of headteachers is now in place.

Support for governors

98. This area was good at the time of the previous inspection. It remains good. The governors' support team is led well by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable head of section. The LEA provides good guidance and information, including performance data, for all governing bodies. There is well-planned and good quality training to support the work of governors, including an induction programme for new governors, in addition to useful termly information briefing meetings with the director of education, leisure and cultural services. Good quality training is also provided for the LEA's clerks, who currently support the vast majority of schools. There is a well-used and responsive help-line, where areas of concern are logged and used to identify areas where future training would be useful.

99. The LEA has been successful in significantly reducing the number of governor vacancies in recent months. This is due to a clear strategy to support the process of appointing governors and the effective approach of contacting any person showing an interest. Good links for recruiting governors have been made with the Excellence in Cities funded governors' one-stop shop, and schools have also been successfully supported in holding information meetings for parents interested in becoming governors.

100. However, as described earlier in the effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools section, notes from advisory visits to schools are not shared routinely with governing bodies.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

101. There was limited fieldwork in inspecting property services, and cleaning and caretaking. Overall, however, the management support services are at least satisfactory, with financial support, payroll, personnel and the administrative support for ICT all good.

102. The LEA has good procedures for reviewing and improving the effectiveness of management support services to schools. The school procurement board is an effective mechanism to help schools to become autonomous and informed purchasers. The board, which is led by headteachers, has carried out a review of all of the services provided to schools, and has been provided with a presentation from the service providers, options on alternative providers and comparative cost information.

103. Schools are now provided with good service level agreements, giving clear information on management support services. The agreements are clear and well costed. There are good links between management support services and the identification of schools causing concern.

104. Support for **administrative ICT** was unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. The LEA was recommended to monitor the effectiveness of the new arrangements for support to schools and to make better use of the ICT infra-structure for

electronic data transfer. Support is now good, with effective links between the different council directorates, schools and outside organisations.

105. The council has invested successfully in the infra-structure to support administrative ICT. All schools have had effective electronic communication since April 1999, and together with libraries and council offices, were connected to broadband in spring 2000. As a result, schools routinely use electronic communications within the school, with the council and with the DfES and other outside organisations.

106. Electronic pupil data systems are developing well. Appropriate links are being developed between curriculum and administrative ICT. The LEA has a central pupil database, which is being used increasingly to implement the common basic data set and to store and transfer data on pupils' performance, attendance and special educational needs. Pupils' data are routinely transferred electronically between primary and secondary schools.

107. At the time of the previous inspection, technical support to schools for their development of administrative ICT was poor. The LEA realised that it was too small to provide this service itself, and decided, instead, to purchase it from Lancashire County Council. Schools are now very positive about the technical support, advice and training that they receive, and about the hardware purchase and support contract.

108. **Financial support services** were highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection and are now good. The LEA took prompt and effective action to overcome interim problems arising from the implementation of a new council ledger system in 2001, and, overall, the quality of financial information to schools and to the LEA is now good. Schools have a range of options on the level of budget advice that they purchase, and they receive good advice appropriate to the level of service that they have purchased. Internal audit arrangements for schools are good. Some financial benchmarking information is provided to schools, but is not yet sufficiently systematic. Payroll services are now good after a poor start on local government reorganisation in 1998. They are accurate, responsive to customer needs and cost-effective.

109. **Personnel services** were unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection, when the LEA was recommended to improve the level of professional expertise. Services are now good and highly valued by schools. Immediately prior to the previous inspection, it had been decided to reorganise the service and transfer it to the education department. A high level of professional expertise has now been built up, to provide schools with up-to-date personnel policies, effective support on recruitment of staff, and good case work and employment law support. Personnel services also have good internal procedures for monitoring their performance.

110. The **property services** provided to schools were satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection and continue to be so. Corporate property services and the direct services organisation provide property advice to schools and manage maintenance work on their behalf. Schools have expressed concerns about the invoicing arrangements for maintenance work. Improvements have been made to these arrangements following discussions at the school procurement board. Advice is provided to schools about their school buildings and information is stored on the property system about maintenance work carried out in schools. Resources for building maintenance are clearly identified in the funding formula. The LEA does not, however, systematically monitor school spending of their resources on building maintenance.

In order to protect the future condition of school buildings the LEA should:

- Monitor schools' spending of their delegated resources on building maintenance.

111. **Catering services** were not inspected previously. On request from schools, services were brought in-house, following the poor performance of a private contractor. The service is now good, and highly valued by schools. Take-up of meals in primary schools is lower than average, but has improved since the in-house service took over. A recent Best Value review judged the services to be a two star, with promising prospects for improvement.

112. **Cleaning services** were highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection, and they continue to be so. The quality of advice and support provided by the council to schools on managing their own cleaning contracts is satisfactory. **Grounds maintenance services** were not inspected previously. They are, however, highly satisfactory. There is a mixed economy of in-house and external contractor provision, and schools who use the service consider that the in-house provider is responsive and effective. Since the integration of the service into the education department, positive moves have been made to link the service to curriculum development in schools, and to develop new park areas for joint school and community use.

The LEA's work in assuring the supply and quality of teachers

113. This area was not previously inspected. The LEA is now providing highly satisfactory support to schools in assuring the supply and quality of teachers. The recruitment and retention of teachers is not a major issue for Blackpool schools. In September 2002, no primary or special schools had any vacancies, and secondary schools only had five. However, recruitment to secondary schools is showing signs of becoming more difficult.

114. An effective and close working partnership has developed between human resource officers, the recruitment strategy manager, and an adviser with the responsibility for continuing professional development work. These officers attend recruitment fairs and initial teacher training colleges, as well as looking at the employment conditions for serving teachers. The LEA's officers are also working with other council colleagues to promote the positive aspects of working in Blackpool, including the sharing of good practice with neighbouring LEAs.

115. A well thought out continuing professional development programme is linked effectively to the LEA's retention strategy. A range of relevant training is on offer to teachers, including a well-planned induction programme for newly qualified teachers, which is monitored by advisers. The LEA has also developed its own training programmes to encourage teachers in middle management posts to become senior managers, and teaching assistants to become teachers. It also makes good use of national training programmes to support the development of staff at all stages of their careers.

Section 3: Special educational needs

Summary of the effectiveness of the LEA's special educational needs provision

116. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection. A good strategy, based on a thorough audit of need and good consultation with schools, is now in place. Funding mechanisms for mainstream schools have been reviewed, with the result that much of the SEN funding is now delegated to schools, giving them greater flexibility in meeting needs in accordance with the Code of Practice. The LEA now provides good value for money in this area. Similarly, there has been significant progress in meeting its statutory obligations and in supporting school improvement and raising standards. Both of these areas are now good.

Under strong leadership, the support for pupils with special educational needs is now being tackled with commitment and energy. Links between the access and inclusion plans and EDP2 are good. Good progress has been made in all areas of the provision.

The LEA's strategy for special educational needs

117. The previous inspection found the LEA's strategy for SEN to be unsatisfactory. The strategy is now good, and is focused well on the LEA's commitment to pupils' inclusion. The special educational needs policy is under further review, and consultation is taking place with a wide range of partners, including schools. The basis of the consultation is the new Code of Practice, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, and the broad national inclusion agenda. The LEA's SEN action plan is of good quality and links effectively with the EDP2, and a range of corporate plans, which includes lifelong learning, health and well being.

118. Good consultation has taken place with schools on developing a policy for inclusion, additional educational needs and delegated funding. All targets related to the delegation of funding to schools have been met. Good monitoring procedures of schools' delegated budgets are in place. Because Blackpool is a small authority, some services have been retained centrally where the majority of schools have opposed delegation and there have been good reasons for doing so, for example, because of the low incidence of sensory support required.

119. The pattern of special school provision has continued as it did at the time of the previous inspection, but it is too soon for this to be reviewed. Ofsted inspections of special schools have generally identified very good practice. The number of out-of-LEA placements has reduced marginally since the previous inspection. This has been achieved by increased partnership working, and increasing the capacity within the LEA through the establishment of four special education resource facilities attached to mainstream schools, which are now able to provide inclusive education for pupils with a wide range of special needs. A further four special education resource facilities are being developed, which should further reduce out-of-borough placements.

120. There has been an increase in the number of pupils with statements educated in mainstream rather than special schools. However, the LEA's SEN strategy has been successful in reducing the number of pupils with statements. The use of a panel for statutory assessment and moderation, which includes headteachers and special needs co-ordinators, has also worked productively in this area. In addition, because of their increased capacity to cope with special needs pupils in mainstream settings, schools are making very few referrals. The educational psychology service, which is centrally retained, has also contributed to this reduction, by increasingly developing its consultation role and early intervention strategies.

121. The LEA does not have a special school for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Most pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties are placed initially in mainstream schools, with extra support and enhanced provision, and then in specialist residential or day centres that cater for their long-term needs. However, some Key Stage 4 pupils who have long-term emotional and behavioural difficulties needs are placed in the pupil referral unit. These are exclusively those pupils who have refused a place in one of the specialist centres.

122. Firm action has been taken on other fronts. The LEA has pressed ahead with the delegation of funding for SEN, giving schools a funding regime in keeping with the Code of

Practice. Schools appreciate this autonomy, and are able to target funding more closely to identified needs. The LEA has tightened the protocols for placing pupils, so that best use can be made of the facilities already available. By investing, as part of the strategy, in a strong parent partnership service, the LEA has greatly improved the capacity to resolve disputes, which currently are few in number. Parents are well supported by the LEA, and parental preference, for placement of pupils who have special educational needs, is a strong feature of the strategy.

Statutory obligations

123. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA met its statutory obligations in a highly satisfactory way. However, considerable progress has been made since then and the LEA now meets its statutory obligations very well. The LEA has improved the percentage of statements of special educational need, produced within 18 weeks, to over 95 per cent. Statements are of good quality, with clearly identified teaching support and targets for pupils. The allocation of resources is well matched to pupils' needs. Statements are reviewed regularly, and there is now a greater readiness to take action and discontinue a statement where appropriate. Annual reviews are well prepared, involving parents and pupils appropriately. The number of statements has reduced. This is the result of better preventative work and good quality training for schools in the writing of individual education plans in all phases. Target setting is also now well focused, particularly in the primary phase.

124. The LEA carries out its responsibilities for a parent partnership service through the Lancashire parent partnership, an independent body, which provides its service to a consortium of Lancashire, Blackpool and Blackburn LEAs, in order to guarantee independence and impartiality. Although it is not extensively used in Blackpool, parents value the help it gives. Although there were no SEN tribunals last year, the co-ordinator works closely and successfully with the LEA's officers, and particularly with the LEA's parent support officer at achieving conciliation.

125. The LEA complies fully with the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act. All special educational needs co-ordinators have been briefed on its requirements, and appropriate in-service training has been provided for them. Physical access plans are required of all schools, and the LEA, after detailed modelling has provided clear guidance on how this is to be done.

School improvement

126. The contribution the LEA makes to school improvement was highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. It is now good. The strengths lie, in particular, in the good levels of support from a wide range of the LEA's well co-ordinated services, including the advisory and inspection service, and also from the health service and the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership. Good support, including training of high quality, is provided for special educational needs co-ordinators and support assistants. The LEA has continued to build successfully on its mechanisms for early intervention for children who have special educational needs. Since the previous inspection, the collective services of the LEA have sustained a good level of challenge and support to schools with regard to special educational needs. In all phases, school evaluations of the LEA's services and training for staff involved with special needs are very positive.

127. Ofsted inspections show that schools which have pupils with special educational needs make at least satisfactory progress, with the exception of a small number of pupils at Key Stage 2, whose progress is poor. The progress of over 80 per cent of under-fives and pupils at Key Stages 1 and 2 is good. At Key Stages 3 and 4, the progress of 50 per cent of pupils who have special educational needs is good. The LEA's attainment database is increasingly effective in monitoring the progress of pupils who have special educational needs. The outcomes of monitoring are analysed, so that actions and resources may be prioritised.

128. The LEA has clear procedures to monitor practice in schools, and their spending of the delegated SEN budget. In an effort to improve schools further, a number of special educational needs co-ordinators are engaged on externally accredited action research projects, supported through the Standards Fund. As a part of these projects, the special educational needs co-ordinators visit other schools to gather information and disseminate good practice.

129. The educational psychology service has been expanded since the previous inspection. The service provides expert advice on a number of specialisms, and in an expanded number of areas, including early years' development. In addition to its statutory assessment work, the service has become increasingly active in its consultative and preventative role. Support services generally are well managed and have good expert knowledge. The work of the SEN link advisory teachers is very effective. The teams for sensory impairment and speech and language difficulties provide a good service, both in special and mainstream schools.

Value for money

130. The value for money for SEN functions was unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection, but is now good. To a considerable extent, this reflects the improvements in the effectiveness of services, and the apportioning of SEN resources, which is well planned and monitored.

131. Overall, Blackpool spends less than average on meeting the special needs of pupils; 14 per cent of the local schools budget, compared with an average of 15.5 per cent in unitary authorities, and 15.7 per cent in England overall. Central resources are higher than average, but this reflects the decision not to make special school provision for some pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. Appropriate provision is made in out-of-borough placements and in mainstream schools with central specialist support. The central support services provide good value for money.

132. Since the previous inspection, the LEA has worked very effectively with schools to delegate resources for high incidence special needs. There was good co-operation with schools in agreeing the formula for delegation. There is effective monitoring of the use of resources by schools.

133. There is a clear financial strategy for future SEN resources. Specialist units are being expanded in schools and the LEA intends to reduce gradually the use of out-of-borough placements, by building up provision in mainstream schools in Blackpool. There are, however, still some uncertainties about future special school provision, primarily relating to the future levels of use of Blackpool's schools by other LEAs.

Section 4: Promoting social inclusion

The strategy to promote social inclusion

134. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA's promotion of social inclusion was satisfactory. It is now good. The council, education, leisure and cultural services directorate and schools have a strong commitment to social inclusion, which is evident in all the policies, strategies and operational planning.

135. There is a multi-agency/cross-directorate and partnership approach to all planning, which is very successful in the authority's support for social inclusion. This is evident through the existence of key groups across the authority, including, for example, the borough-wide social inclusion group that is chaired by the head of policy, the children and young people strategic partnership, corporate parenting and the working group for transient pupils. All these groups play a crucial part in delivering the social inclusion agenda within Blackpool. The council's community strategy and corporate strategy plans both have social inclusion as a key priority permeating throughout. There is also a separate policy on social inclusion. In education, it is embedded throughout the EDP2, and in the education social work service (ESWS) there is a social inclusion business plan.

136. The LEA has a central team, which is pivotal to ensuring that there is prompt intervention on behalf of those children who are at risk of social exclusion or harm. This team monitors the effectiveness of policy and support provided to the wide range of children at risk. The team is also now keeping electronic data for attendance, exclusions, behaviour and attainment for all groups of pupils.

137. Good use has been made of external funding, including the Pupil Retention Grant, Excellence in Cities, Neighbourhood Renewal, Single Regeneration Budget and Sure Start projects. Schools are very positive about the priority given, and the support provided, to promote social inclusion within schools and across the community. There are early indications that the attendance of pupils in the Learning Support Units is improving, and that improvements in behaviour and attainment may also be occurring.

The supply of school places

138. School place planning was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. It is now good. Effective action has been taken to increase substantially the number of places in both the primary and secondary sector.

139. The school organisation committee works effectively and has considered and taken decisions on a wide range of issues, including expansion of school capacity, amalgamation of schools, changes in standard numbers, establishment of special educational resource facilities and change in status of a school from community to voluntary aided. The LEA works well with a range of partners, including diocesan authorities.

140. There are strong links between school place planning and other planning processes, including school improvement priorities and capital investment through the asset management plan. Forecasting of pupil numbers is complex because of high pupil mobility, but effective models have been developed to take account of relevant factors such as birth rates, housebuilding and transience.

141. The LEA has been very successful in making Basic Needs bids for capital investment for new places. When the current development programmes are completed, 3200 extra places will have been provided in the secondary sector, and 300 in the primary sector. The investment in secondary places has been linked to a drive to change the perception that parents have of Blackpool's secondary schools. Supply and demand will then be in balance with a low number of surplus places. As a result, the percentage of pupils transferring to secondary schools outside the borough has reduced from 14 per cent in 1998, to two per cent in 2001.

142. Forecasting of pupil numbers is complex because of high pupil mobility, but effective models have been developed to take into account the range of factors, including new housing provision.

Admissions

143. Admission procedures were satisfactory at time of the previous inspection, but the LEA was recommended to develop a primary school planning strategy that took account of the high level of mobility in the pupil population. Good progress has been made in this area, and admission procedures are now good, with substantial increases in parental preferences being achieved, reductions in appeals and the introduction of a protocol for non-routine admissions.

144. The substantial increase in school places has had a positive impact on admissions procedures. Parental first choice of schools at secondary level has increased from 82 per cent to 96 per cent since 1998. For the same period, it has risen from 92 per cent to 99 per cent in the primary schools. The number of appeals has nearly halved, reducing from 924 in 1998/1999 to 522 in 2001/2002. Appeals processes are managed effectively, with recent extra training being provided to members of the appeal panel.

145. The LEA is well placed to meet the new DfES requirements on admissions. It has already co-ordinated arrangements and timetables for admissions, and informal liaison also takes place with the neighbouring county council. The admissions forum is being established. Information to parents is good. Extensive consultation was recently carried out on admissions criteria, but it was decided to retain the current criteria of siblings, medical and social issues, followed by the safest walking distance as they most effectively met the needs of parents.

146. There is a high incidence of non-routine admissions, due to the very high level of transience among the Blackpool population. The LEA has negotiated an appropriate protocol with schools for non-routine admissions, including a reduction in the number of transfers between schools in the borough. However, it has only been in place since the summer of 2002, and it is, therefore, too early to judge its long-term impact.

Asset management, including property services

147. Asset management planning is good. Substantial capital investment is improving the condition of Blackpool's schools. The LEA had initial difficulty with the DfES requirements on school condition data, but has now met all of the DfES asset management planning requirements and its performance has been judged to be highly satisfactory on production of its statement of priorities. Condition data provided to the DfES identifies that the backlog in Blackpool's schools is lower than the average for other authorities. The LEA has a clear plan to use available capital resources to reduce the backlog.

148. The LEA has been successful in attracting around £25 million in investment in schools in the area over the last three years. The LEA has secured a further £20 million to fund its capital programme over the next three years. The council has provided £300,000 per year as part of its landlord responsibility for school buildings. The resources have been used effectively to expand places in some schools and to deal with condition and modernisation issues in others. The capacity to design and project manage the increasing range of projects has needed to be expanded. As a result, the council has been able to deliver the individual capital projects to the satisfaction of schools.

149. Schools are very positive about the quality of information that has been provided to them about their school buildings. Consultation arrangements with schools for prioritisation of capital investment are good.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

150. At the time of the previous inspection, the provision for pupils who have no school place was satisfactory. It is now good. Since then, the LEA has resolved the major concern about the lack of a permanent base for Key Stage 4 pupils. Three separate centres have been established for pupils in Key Stages 2, 3 and 4, which, along with the hospital service and a teenage mothers' centre, now form the registered pupil referral unit. The LEA has developed a clear strategy that draws on various partnerships, and a rigorous process for tracking pupils who are out of school, to ensure that no pupils become lost to education. This good practice has been recognised on the DfES website.

151. Inter-agency support for pupils educated other than at school (EOTAS) is good. The wide-ranging work of EOTAS is overseen and monitored effectively by a management committee, which comprises elected members, officers from the LEA and a further education representative. The committee is effectively supported by the pupil referral unit manager, and a multi-agency group, which oversees the exclusions register, admissions and placements.

152. Effective structures are in place to ensure that pupils who have a long-term illness, are excluded or pregnant are provided with appropriate provision promptly. Pupils' attainment, attendance and curriculum provision are effectively monitored by a link adviser and education social worker (ESW), both of whom are assigned to the pupil referral unit. The LEA has also worked hard to introduce new initiatives, including the appointment of an exclusions officer to track exclusions, and the establishment of learning support units in secondary schools. Both these initiatives have contributed to the decreasing number of permanent exclusions in Blackpool's schools.

153. Headteachers have agreed a reintegration strategy for excluded pupils with the LEA, which is mostly successful. Although the long-term placement of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties is not encouraged in the pupil referral unit, there is a small number of Year 10 pupils who have been there for over a year without reintegration. These are comprised entirely of pupils who have refused to take up a place in one of the out-of-borough specialist residential or day centres. The LEA is fully aware of the challenges that these pupils create for the pupil referral unit, and have worked closely with the youth offending team to make what is a satisfactory overall provision for these pupils.

Recommendation

In order to improve the provision at the pupil referral unit:

- Establish reintegration strategies for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

154. The LEA monitors well the provision and attainment of teenage mothers and pupils educated at home. The LEA has produced clear guidance for parents considering educating their children at home. The attendance and attainment of teenage mothers is good, and better than nationally.

Attendance

155. At the time of the previous inspection, the support for attendance was satisfactory. However, while there has been improvement in some individual school's attendance rates, the LEA's rates of attendance at both primary and secondary levels have remained below the national averages since the previous inspection. At secondary level they are below 90 per cent. Authorised and unauthorised rates of absence in both phases are above the national averages. Overall, therefore, this area is unsatisfactory.

156. In the previous inspection, high pupil mobility and Travellers' children associated with the seaside tourist industry were seen as major contributors to the low attendance rates. The LEA has been unable to make significant progress against these issues since the previous inspection, and many of those pupils remain the most persistent non-attenders at school.

Recommendation

In order to improve schools' attendance:

- Ensure that support and intervention are targeted at pupils with the most persistent attendance problems.

157. The structures and services to support attendance have improved, and are now highly satisfactory. Improving attendance is a key LEA priority, and it is integrated well into the council's policy for improved social inclusion. The targets in the EDP2 are realistic, yet challenging. These are produced through a sound consultation process with schools, educational social workers and 'Excellence in Blackpool'.

158. The support from the education social work service is good. The LEA and ESW service have produced clear guidelines on attendance at school, and on the role of the education social work service. The ESW is playing a major role in addressing low attendance rates across the LEA, and is generally well regarded by the schools. The service provides differentiated support to all schools, depending on a variety of indicators, which include attendance statistics and mobility rates. For some schools this can result in 2½ days per week of focused support. Additionally, ESWs have been proactive in supporting schools in the production of attendance plans and target setting. They produce a termly progress report for each school, and provide challenge, through the setting of summary action points, for the forthcoming term. Overall, the ESW provides good value for money.

159. The LEA and ESW effectively collate and analyse school attendance data, including that for vulnerable pupils and those of minority ethnic heritage. Several high schools are starting to pilot electronic registration of pupils. The LEA has also introduced several partnership initiatives that are having a positive effect on improving attendance rates at targeted schools. For example, truancy sweeps with the police are held on a regular basis,

the work of learning mentors in learning support units, and a partnership with Blackpool Football Club in parenting attendance awards have all contributed to improving attendance.

160. The LEA actively pursues, where appropriate, legal proceedings against parents. The DfES has acknowledged the Blackpool model as good, and has designated it a Pathfinder in the field.

Behaviour support

161. No substantial fieldwork was carried out during this inspection, but inspectors read relevant documents provided by the LEA, and also took account of the pre-inspection schools' survey. At the time of the previous inspection the LEA had effective arrangements for behaviour support. Despite significant changes in the service since then, behaviour support continues to be highly satisfactory, with some strengths. Permanent exclusions have continued to fall since 2000, and are now at a third of what they were at that time. For the same period, the fixed period exclusions have fluctuated from being in line to slightly above the national averages. However, a recent LEA initiative has led to a significant reduction in the number and length of fixed-period exclusions.

162. Changes have taken place as a result of the delegation of funding to schools. Behaviour support and learning support posts have been reduced centrally, but schools are able to draw on the central service for support and advice, when assistance and guidance are required. Some schools have used the delegated funding to buy in the full-time services of former members of the LEA's behaviour support team. These changes have also resulted in the development of a new behaviour support plan. This is of very good quality, but requires schools to be more accountable for the behaviour support of their own pupils, and to develop close partnership working arrangements with the LEA's officers and advisers. There is also a strong focus on early intervention. To support these new developments, the LEA continues to provide good quality in-service courses that are focused on behaviour improvement.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

163. At the time of the previous inspection, this area was satisfactory. It is now highly satisfactory. There is a comprehensive handbook and set of guidelines on all aspects of health and safety. These are supported well by a thorough training programme, which is well monitored and evaluated. The LEA has provided a comprehensive set of health and safety audit sheets for schools to complete on an annual basis and records are kept of accidents, in line with the requirements of the Health and Safety Executive, along with ongoing enquiries and requests for help from schools.

164. There are clear policies and procedures at corporate and education directorate levels that help ensure children are protected. Good relationships exist between senior officers in education and social services, and there are good multi-agency partnerships at corporate and operational levels through the children and young people partnership, and the Blackpool child protection committee. The latter is a key driving force on which education plays a major role, with additional representatives from many services including the police, housing, health and representative headteachers.

165. The LEA retains an up-to-date register of designated school staff responsible for child protection. There is an appropriate training programme available to staff, and regular audits are kept of their training. The Blackpool child protection committee is shortly to appoint a support officer who will be responsible for business planning and the development

of a training plan. The LEA has developed several successful initiatives to safeguard vulnerable children, including truancy sweeps and an out-of-school register system for tracking missing children who are new to the borough. The authority has successfully addressed the previous problems of staffing shortages and regular staff changes in social services.

Looked after children

166. At the time of the previous inspection, the extent to which the LEA met its statutory requirements with regard to looked after children was satisfactory. The quality of support is now good. The council fulfils its responsibility as the corporate parent well, by ensuring that looked after children are high on their social inclusion agenda. There is also an established elected members children's forum, which monitors and reviews the needs of looked after children.

167. The links between education and social services have improved since the previous inspection, and are now satisfactory. The directors of education, leisure and cultural services and social services meet regularly to discuss issues of looked after children, and an effective multi-agency corporate parenting group has been established to manage the strategic and operational planning for meeting the needs of these children.

168. The children services plan and Quality Protects management plan are good. They outline clear and coherent strategies for promoting educational attainment. The LEA has set generally realistic and challenging performance indicators and National Priority Guidance targets for raising the attainment of looked after children. Data are shared on attendance, exclusions and attainment with a wide range of services, members, the school improvement service and education social workers.

169. The attendance of looked after children is in line with the national average, with the number of exclusions well below. However, their attainment at the end of each key stage is well below the national average. At Key Stage 3, seven per cent achieved Level 5+, with only nine per cent achieving five or more A*- C grades at GCSE. The council has, now, agreed some challenging targets, as part of their local public service agreements. It has proposed a number of initiatives to meet these, including funding for additional tuition for Year 11 pupils, and the development of a pupil data tracking system that triggers additional educational psychologist support in schools.

170. All schools have nominated teachers for looked after children, with regularly updated and centrally held registers. The education social workers provide regular training for schools' and social services' staff and foster carers, to help them in their role as parent educators. Specialist staff within the education directorate have also developed specific training, and are currently monitoring the attainment and attendance of all looked after children. The LEA's policy for developing personal education plans is being implemented, and 68 per cent of looked after children have one in place, with a further nine per cent undergoing completion.

Measures to combat racism

171. At the time of the previous inspection, measures to combat racism were satisfactory. The LEA needed to update advice on reporting racist incidents, in line with recommendations from the Macpherson report into the death of Stephen Lawrence, and was also required to

improve the support provided for minority ethnic pupils. In both these aspects, sound progress has been made and, overall, the support for schools is now highly satisfactory, with some good features.

172. The LEA provides good advice to schools. An advisory teacher in charge of racial monitoring has overseen the production of a good policy and set of guidelines to schools on ways to tackle racism by taking preventative measures and reporting incidents. This is supported well by appropriate and focused in-service training for teachers. Schools and authority staff are now well briefed on procedures for monitoring and reporting any incidences of racial inequality or harassment.

173. Every school sends a termly report identifying any racial incident, and this information is stored on a database that is shared with the senior management team, link advisers, a minority ethnic liaison group, and all schools. The LEA's officers follow up incidents of a serious nature quickly and effectively. The LEA has also provided each school with guidance and a template for producing their own policy on combating racism, in the light of the recommendation from the report into the death of Stephen Lawrence.

174. The LEA has begun to support schools well in addressing racial equality through the curriculum. Schools have been provided with lists of commercially available support materials, and an external consultant has been bought in to deliver training and support for schools.

175. In 2001, the council commissioned a report into race equality. This resulted in an excellent report entitled 'Blackpool Responds'. The report gave a clear picture of the position in Blackpool, and proposed some very clear recommendations for moving forward. In response, the council produced a draft policy on race equality, but has yet to act upon it.

176. There is an ethnic minority liaison forum that meets regularly, and represents fully a wide range of services and minority ethnic groups from the local community. The forum has been active in raising the profile of race equality, and in bringing about positive and constructive change within the borough. However, the forum is not a strategic decision-making body and, while there is an elected member on the group, there is no formal point of contact at council level to take strategic responsibility for race equality. This has led to slow and fragmented progress.

Recommendations

In order to improve measures to combat racism :

- establish and implement an approved council policy for race equality, taking account of consultation with the Blackpool community; and
- implement a strategic action plan to address the findings of the 'Blackpool Responds' report.

Section 5: Corporate issues

Introduction to corporate issues

177. There were many weaknesses in this area at the time of the previous inspection. Progress has been made since then and, with the exception of the clarity, consistency and coherence, and evaluation of corporate plans, provision in this area is now at least satisfactory or better. Senior officers in education are actively and effectively supporting the work of schools. There is a relatively new chief executive in post, who is working well with both elected members and the director of education, leisure and cultural services to promote and develop further the role of education within and across the authority. The modernised local government structure, with a cabinet and two scrutiny committees, is generally representing well the voice of education at full council level.

Corporate planning

178. At the time of the previous inspection, corporate planning was good and the procedures for implementing and evaluating major plans were satisfactory. Provision in these areas is now unsatisfactory. The three major corporate plans for education are the community plan, corporate plan and the education strategic plan. Overall, they do not link together to form a coherent overview of the major priorities for the authority, and there is also an inconsistent use of targets, against which the authority measures its progress.

179. The community plan has six priorities, one of which includes the promotion of lifelong learning. This priority covers an appropriate range of areas, including raising attainment, improving attendance, the development of key skills, better access for all pupils, improved provision for early years, and greater adult participation in lifelong learning. Each area has specific targets, but the general nature of some of these makes it difficult to measure the relative progress or achievement of the LEA over a given time period. For example, there are targets to increase, by ten per cent, the number of pupils achieving Level 4+ in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2. However, it is not clear what the targeted outcomes are, when they should be achieved, or how well they compare with national averages or other LEAs, for whom the range of local characteristics is similar.

180. The corporate plan has three parts: the vision, the core values and six corporate priorities. The vision outlines what the authority would like to achieve by 2005. The core values include key indicators, but there is little explanation of their origin. There are, however, some key performance indicators listed, some of which are appropriately benchmarked against Audit Commission data. The six priorities are identical in name to those found in the community plan, but are ordered differently, with key indicators, as opposed to targets, that are different and more detailed. In theory, the two plans should align, but in reality they do not because of the inconsistent terminology and level of detail.

181. The education strategic plan makes specific reference to the corporate priorities as a basis for underpinning the work of the education, leisure and cultural services directorate. However, the details are those from the community plan, which, as indicated above, differ in detail from the corporate plan. Overall, there is inconsistency of cross-referencing within and across these three major plans.

Recommendations

In order to improve the clarity, consistency and coherence of corporate planning:

- align identified priorities across all major plans; and
- ensure that all targets/key indicators are sufficiently detailed and aligned across all the major plans.

182. The authority has developed appropriate procedures, carried out quarterly, to monitor and evaluate its progress against local performance indicators and Best Value performance indicators from the different directorates. However, there is very limited information to indicate the timescales relative to the progress made. It is, therefore, difficult to assess accurately whether progress is being made at an appropriate rate. Also, there is no indication of any action resulting from the scrutiny of these monitoring reports.

Recommendations

In order to monitor and evaluate progress more appropriately at a corporate level:

- specify the timescales for each priority area within the major plans; and
- identify required action, which results from the monitoring reports.

Decision making

183. Corporate decision making is highly satisfactory, having been satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. The modernised local government structure within Blackpool has helped to improve the type and speed of decision making within education. The scrutiny of policy decisions is generally satisfactory. During the last year, the scrutiny committee has received and approved executive action on a broad range of education matters. These have included Ofsted school inspection reports, examination and end of key stage test results, childrens' services linked to education, the EDP2, behaviour support plan, literacy and numeracy strategies, and ICT. This work has been tackled enthusiastically, but there is yet to develop a rigorous and robust procedure, which holds the executive to account for its policy decisions.

184. The speed of financial decision making is satisfactory. The methods for consulting schools on educational needs and priorities, and reasons for retaining central controls of particular items of expenditure are very good. These have resulted in consensus being achieved on the implementation of a new funding formula, including the delegation of substantially increased resources for SEN.

Leadership of elected members and officers

185. At the time of the previous inspection, the quality of leadership given by elected members and seniors officers was satisfactory. It remains the same for elected members, but that from senior officers is now good.

186. Elected members generally have a clear sense of purpose and direction for education. The executive fulfils well its responsibilities in a broad range of educational matters, and since the previous inspection, has continued to build upon the positive relationships it has with schools. Lead members meet on a regular basis with senior officers to exchange information on emerging issues. This is effective in ensuring that there is regular dialogue

and that the interests of the education directorate are kept to the fore in the political decision-making process.

187. The quality of leadership given by officers has improved since the previous inspection. There is a strong commitment to school improvement, particularly in helping schools to raise their overall standards of attainment. The range of education related plans are of at least satisfactory quality. The main plan, the EDP2, is good. Staff are committed to achieving the priorities in these plans and this is effectively communicated to schools. There is also a commitment to national and local initiatives, which would help achieve the stated priorities of the LEA, for example the national strategies in literacy and numeracy, Key Stage 3, and 'Excellence in Blackpool'. Local initiatives have involved more specific work in dealing with the high rates of mobility found in a significant number of the LEA's schools. The LEA has worked successfully with University College London and with individual primary schools, to develop strategies to address the effect of high pupil mobility on attainment and attendance. Over the next year this work will begin to focus on the secondary phase.

188. Since the previous inspection, the quality of advice given by the LEA's officers to elected members has improved. It was unsatisfactory, and is now highly satisfactory. The information provided is detailed and well presented. An accompanying form provides members with the main recommendations emerging from the information paper, together with any legislative details relevant to the particular item. While this is generally a helpful process for executive members, there is no executive summary as an aid to members, particularly at meetings where there is a large number of information papers to be read and discussed.

Partnership

189. The LEA's collaboration with other agencies is satisfactory, with some good features. Senior officers have worked effectively with a number of agencies, and have developed positive professional relationships with their partners.

190. Strong links have been established with the dioceses in asset management planning, property services and in the planning of school places. The exchange of information is good, and diocesan representatives are involved and well informed. However, the exchange of information on school improvement issues is less clear. There are termly meetings between senior officers and some, but not all, diocesan representatives to discuss school issues. However, diocesan officers are not involved in the regular meetings between schools and the LEA's link officers, and notes of visit to voluntary aided schools are not formally or routinely copied to the diocesan link officer.

Recommendation

In order to improve the links between the LEA and dioceses:
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• establish clear procedures about the exchange of information about school improvement. |
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191. Links with the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) are sound. There has been a useful exchange of information between the LEA and SACRE, with officers providing appropriate and timely advice.

192. Consultation with local unions representing teachers and other employees is at least satisfactory, more often good. Since the previous inspection, meetings between officers and

union representatives have continued to develop, and now take place monthly. The union representatives engage in purposeful dialogue with senior officers, within an atmosphere of professional trust.

193. Partnerships with schools are very good. There is a clear sense of shared values and purpose of direction between the LEA and its schools. There are regular meetings between headteachers from all phases and the director of education, leisure and cultural services. Consultation is good, exemplified in the recent exercise of writing the EDP2. There is a better balance since the previous inspection between the LEA's challenge and support of its schools, and individual schools' need to show their independence on different issues.

194. There are effective partnership links with the health authority and the police. The health authority has supported well the provision of pupils, for whom a statement of special educational need is required. It has responded in good time, and supported those pupils very effectively. The police have also linked effectively with the LEA on race relations committees, and in supporting truancy sweeps.

195. Links with the Learning and Skills Council, the sixth form college and the further education college are satisfactory. There are regular meetings between the principals of the two colleges, the chief executive of the Learning and Skills Council and the director of education, leisure and cultural services. These have yet to be formalised in terms of minutes and action planning, but an encouraging start has been made to discussions around post-16 provision. One direct outcome has been the publication of the recently joint commissioned draft report on provision for 14-19 year-olds.

196. Links between the LEA and the local strategic partnership are satisfactory. The local strategic partnership was constituted in late 2000, with a membership of 27. There is, however, an intention to increase the membership to 54 to include more community, voluntary, public and private sector representatives. The authority is well represented by two elected members, both of whom have links with the education directorate. The principal of the further education college is currently chairing a sub-group responsible for overseeing the spending of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund on nominated education priorities. These are closely aligned to the stated priorities in the EDP2, and include additional funding for the 'Excellence in Blackpool' initiative, support for raising attainment at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4, and the appointment of a transience co-ordinator to support and track mobile pupils.

Support for early years

197. This area was not inspected previously. However, the current provision for early years is good. Ofsted inspections show that 96 per cent of settings are assessed as being good or very good. Arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the attainment and progress of children in early years' settings are well established, and training has been given, in all settings, in the use of the Foundation Stage profile.

198. The Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership is well established, and has good quality strategic and operational plans that are closely linked to the EDP2 priority one. Actions arise from a clear audit of provision, and, as such, are well targeted and appropriate. The partnership has been successful in targeting support to enable vulnerable children to access early years' provision, and to deploy well financial resources to priorities. Expansion of provision, particularly in areas of disadvantage, is progressing at a good rate and can accommodate 100 per cent of 3 and 4 year-olds, for whom places are being sought in early

years settings. Currently, this includes 86 per cent of all three year-olds and 95 per cent of all four year-olds.

199. The LEA works very effectively within the partnership, providing a wide range of resources to support initiatives in all early years' settings. Leadership provided by the LEA's personnel is very positive. The LEA also provides good quality training and guidance to meet the needs of schools and settings, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds or those with special educational needs. Provision for young children with additional and/or special educational needs is good, and this is well integrated with the social services and health provision. These demonstrate good multi-agency working practices, and the LEA's commitment to inclusion in the early years' phase. In addition, the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership has established strong working links with the LEA's cultural services, the advisory service, leisure services and the school meals service. The partnership is also proactive in developing other initiatives; for example, in establishing a childminders' network, a teenage parent network, and in producing an employer's guide to childcare, in an effort to create more jobs for parents. The initiatives within the early years' provision are managed with vision.

Support for 14-19 education

200. This aspect was not previously inspected. However, the current provision is satisfactory. Since the previous inspection, considerable changes have taken place in Blackpool's secondary schools. In addition to a major capital scheme that has affected all secondary schools, two have changed from single sex to mixed entry, and a third has become a Church of England Voluntary Aided school and has doubled in size. The DfES has identified three of the secondary schools as operating in challenging circumstances. Post-16 provision is based on one of the secondary schools, the sixth form college, and a local college of further education.

201. The LEA has recently jointly commissioned an independent review of the 14–19 provision, in association with Lancashire LEA and the Learning and Skills Council. The resultant draft strategy paper identified a number of strengths, such as an extensive array of 14-16 link courses available to schools, and a good range of advanced level provision. However, significant weaknesses were reported, especially in staying-on rates. This report has already made a significant contribution to the debate in the LEA about issues relating to 14-19 education. A lead officer is now in post, a draft strategy paper has been published and the LEA has already consulted schools over an innovative proposal to create a federation of schools and colleges in Blackpool. This federation aims to produce a more coherent curriculum across schools and colleges by addressing issues such as the progression and access of 14-19 pupils, reducing the attainment gap, improving learning through ICT, and extending the vocational curriculum in schools. The aims of this initiative closely match those of the 'Excellence in Blackpool' scheme, and have attracted enthusiastic support from most headteachers. Secondary schools are now developing close and productive working links. There is, as yet, no reference to post-16 provision in the EDP2.

202. The 'Excellence in Blackpool' initiative has already made a positive contribution to developments at Key Stage 4. Some of the key themes of the initiative in its first year include providing effective support for individual students, using resources to service individuals' needs, improving provision for gifted and talented pupils, and making better use of adults other than teachers in schools, especially learning mentors. In the first year, most of its targets in relation to these themes were met.

203. The LEA's capacity for improvement in 14-19 education is good, and there is now a new commitment to change and a clear sense of direction. The LEA has a clear desire to encourage schools and colleges to work more closely together. The director of education, leisure and cultural services has initiated regular, informal meetings with the principals of the two local colleges, and is now seeking to increase links between the colleges and the secondary schools. The LEA provides good support to the local Connexions service and works closely with the Learning and Skills Council. Three secondary schools have achieved specialist college status and the LEA's policy is that all schools should follow suit. This is seen as a powerful means of raising the status of education in the community, providing access to excellence and recognising that all schools have areas of good practice, which should be shared.

Appendix 1: Recommendations

This report makes a number of recommendations, which are key to the LEA accelerating the rate of progress and raising levels of attainment and improving attendance of pupils. The following are fundamental and work should begin on them immediately. They are:

In order to improve schools' attendance:

- ensure that support and intervention are targeted at pupils with the most persistent attendance problems.

The report also makes the following recommendations. They are:

In order to improve the clarity, consistency and coherence of corporate planning:

- align identified priorities across all major plans; and
- ensure that all targets/key indicators are sufficiently detailed and aligned across all the major plans.

In order to monitor and evaluate progress more appropriately at a corporate level:

- specify the timescales for each priority area within the major plans; and
- identify required action, which results from the monitoring reports.

In order to assist in the monitoring and evaluation of the EDP2:

- detail more specific timescales for the range of priority activities.

In order to target support more effectively for schools most in need, the LEA should:

- establish levels of support for successful schools to ensure that they are fully encouraged to develop autonomy; and
- monitor more closely all visits to schools to ensure that they conform to the agreed level of service.

In order to improve the effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools:

- ensure that all notes of visits provide a clear evaluation of the strengths, weaknesses and any follow-up action required by the school and the LEA; and
- make better use of the visit reports and the annual report to governing bodies to provide schools with a clear LEA view of strengths and weaknesses.

In order to improve the support for literacy and numeracy in schools, the strategy teams should:

- link each school action plan specifically to performance targets.

In order to improve the provision at the pupil referral unit:

- establish reintegration strategies for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

In order to improve measures to combat racism :

- establish and implement an approved council policy for race equality, taking account of consultation with the Blackpool community; and
- implement a strategic action plan to address the findings of the ‘Blackpool Responds’ report.

In order to improve the links between the LEA and dioceses:

- establish clear procedures about the exchange of information about school improvement.

In order to protect the future condition of school buildings the LEA should:

- monitor schools’ spending of their delegated resources on building maintenance.

Appendix 2: Record of Judgement Recording Statements for the inspection

No.	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	NI
SECTION 1 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY			
1	The socio-economic context of the LEA	6	
2	The performance of schools	5	
3	Funding, including the co-ordination of external funding	4	
4	The LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP and EiC	2	
5	The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP and EiC	4	NI
6	The extent to which the LEA targets its resources on priorities	2	NI
7	The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement including Best Value	3	
SECTION 2 SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT			
8	The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge, and intervention and shared those understandings with schools	3	
9	The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	4	
10	The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data	3	NI
11	The effectiveness of LEA identification of and intervention in under-performing schools	4	
12	Support to schools for raising standards in Literacy	3	
13	Support to schools for raising standards in Numeracy	3	
14	Support to schools for raising standards in and the curriculum use of information and communications technology	2	
No.	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	NI
15	Support to schools for raising standards at Key Stage 3	3	
16	Support to schools in raising standards of ethnic minority and Traveller children including the effective deployment of the ethnic minority and Traveller achievement grants	3	
17	Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils	3	
18	Support for school leadership and management including support for schools effort to achieve Best Value	3	NI
19	Support to school governors	2	
20	The effectiveness of its services to support school management	2	
20a	Financial services	2	
20b	Human resources	2	
20c	Property services	4	NI
20d	Services for ICT in school administration	2	
20e	Cleaning and caretaking	3	NI
20f	Grounds maintenance	3	
20g	Catering	2	
21	The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	3	
22	The effectiveness of the leadership of services to support school improvement	3	
23	The effectiveness of the deployment of staff to support school improvement	3	
24	The effectiveness of strategic planning of services to support school improvement	3	
25	The effectiveness of the performance management of services to support school improvement	4	
26	The standard of expertise of staff to support school improvement	2	
27	The effectiveness of services to school improvement	3	
28	Value for money of services to support school improvement	4	
SECTION 3 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS			
29	The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for SEN	2	
30	The effectiveness of the LEA in taking steps to meet its statutory obligations in respect of SEN	2	

31	The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement	2	
32	The extent to which the LEA has exercised its SEN functions to meet the requirements of value for money	2	
SECTION 4 PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION			
33	The overall effectiveness of the LEA in promoting social inclusion	2	
34	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	2	
No.	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	NI
35	The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	2	
36	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools	2	
37	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to provision for pupils who have no school place	2	
38	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to school attendance	5	
39	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to behaviour at school	3	NI
40	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to health and safety, welfare and child protection	3	
41	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to children in public care	2	
42	The effectiveness of the LEA in combating racism	3	
SECTION 5 CORPORATE ISSUES			
43	The clarity, consistency, coherence and feasibility of corporate plans	5	
44	The effectiveness of the procedures for implementing and evaluating corporate plans	5	
45	The speed, transparency and effectiveness of decision-making (particularly financial decision-making)	3	
46	The quality of leadership provided by elected members	4	
47	The quality of the leadership provided by senior officers	2	
48	The quality of advice given by elected members	3	
49	The effectiveness of the co-ordination of actions in support of priorities involving collaboration between several agencies	4	
OVERALL JUDGEMENTS			
50	The progress made by the LEA overall	3	
51	The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection	2	
52	The overall effectiveness of the LEA	3	

JRS numerical judgements are allocated on a 1 to 7 point scale:

- Grade 1 – Very good
- Grade 2 – Good
- Grade 3 – Highly satisfactory
- Grade 4 – Satisfactory
- Grade 5 – Unsatisfactory
- Grade 6 – Poor, significant weaknesses
- Grade 7 – Very poor, fails to provide effective support to schools**